



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Fred Akshar

Senator Fred Akshar continues “Akshar's All-Stars” student recognition program at three local schools

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| ISSUE: **AKSHAR'S ALL-STARS**



Senator Fred Akshar continued the fourth year of his district-wide “Akshar's All-Stars” student recognition program by recognizing students at Johnson City High School, Maine Memorial Elementary and Tioga Hills Elementary.

Each month, Senator Akshar recognizes local students selected by their school districts in the 52nd Senate District who have shown great leadership, compassion, school spirit or

improvement amongst their peers. Due to COVID-19, the latest round of All-Stars were recognized remotely via Zoom.

For each student recognized as an “Akshar All-Star”, Senator Akshar presents them with a t-shirt and a framed certificate..

From **Johnson City High School**, Akshar honored senior **Ryan Johnson**, who is described by her school district as the unsung hero in her school and community. Tied for Valedictorian, of the class of 2021, Ryan’s a responsible, well-rounded student athlete who also “tears it up” on the basketball court and lacrosse. Always willing to do what’s best for everyone else, Ryan volunteers for every community service opportunity that’s offered. Throughout the pandemic she’s remained focused and committed in her studies and successfully completed every class assignment given, while still having time to help her fellow classmates.

“Don’t let the Coronavirus be an excuse to not do your work or an excuse to not be a good student or person,” said Ryan Johnson. “Just be a good person.”

From **Maine Memorial Elementary**, Akshar recognized 5th grader **Kylie Chase** for being a role model student throughout the pandemic. A fully remote student, Kylie has nonetheless made sure to never miss a Zoom class and continue making gains in reading, writing and math skills. When COVID-19 first hit, Kylie and her mom made masks to donate to the community, using her own money to purchase supplies to make them.

From **Tioga Hills Elementary**, Akshar recognized 5th grader **Ben Cucci** for turning tragedy into triumph for his family and his community. Despite being only 10 years old, Ben is the founder and CEO of the nonprofit organization,

Nathan's Butterflies. After experiencing the loss of his baby brother Nathan in 2016, Ben and his family wanted to pay it forward with acts of kindness after being on the receiving end during such a difficult time. Ben was only 6 years old when he lost his brother, but he still had a keen understanding how instrumental his school, his neighborhood and his Southern Tier community were in helping his family grieve.

"I wanted to do something to help remember Nathan because only a few people ever got to meet him," said Ben Cucci. "I came up with random acts of kindness and it kept getting bigger."

The goal of Nathan's Butterflies is to spread kindness and to encourage others to do so as well. This idea was sparked by all that he had received and it compelled him to discuss doing similar kindness acts in the community. The butterfly theme was created out of an idea that kindness brings people hope. Ben and his family knew all too well how hope was a healing force for their family. Ben began leaving Nathan's Butterflies cards and a kind deeds and it spread quickly, even reaching other states and countries. When people "pay it forward", they share their kind deed through the Nathan's Butterflies Facebook page. Ben would leave baskets of toys at playground and beaches, leaving quarters in shopping carts for people and more. As the organization grew, Ben and his "Butterfly Crew" have helped provide supplies for his school, kept food pantries stocked and fill his local "Little Free Library" with books. When the COVID pandemic hit, Nathan's Butterflies utilized grant funding to help provide local essential workers with much-needed supplies.

"The kindness inspired and spread by Nathan's Butterflies have spread across the country and even across the globe," said Senator Fred Akshar. "We're so fortunate to be part of a community that produces kids like Ben, who, at such a young age, has already committed to

trying to unite people and spread kindness in his community and around the world. If more people thought like Ben, the world would be a much better place.”

To learn more about Nathan's Butterflies and how you can help spread kindness, please visit www.nathansbutterflies.com.

Senator Fred Akshar said, "During these difficult times, I'm truly inspired by the amazing work and service that's still being done by young people in our community. It's important that we continue to shine a bright light on these outstanding individuals and let their stories be told. In a time when the nation seems so divided, I'm happy to continue supporting such a great recognition program that shows the best in our young people.”

Video of Johnson City High School Akshar's All-Stars presentation:

<https://youtu.be/SmP3lhDajEk>

Video of Maine Memorial Elementary All-Stars presentation:

<https://youtu.be/HRMaWkwCGLI>

Video of Tioga Hills Elementary All-Stars presentation: <https://youtu.be/uHJEFa5JyPo>